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ABSTRACT

Approximately 100 adults participated in a study that investigated the themes of communication people use to characterize their relationships. The subjects produced 55 self-reports: 29 audiotaped dyadic discussions, 12 audiotaped group discussions, and 14 written logs. Dyadic discussants were romantic couples (dating or married), roommates, relatives, coworkers, and others; group participants were three or more family members, dormmates, and housemates. In the audiotaped tasks, subjects talked about their relationships, stimulated by several topics provided on an instruction sheet. Those keeping logs wrote about a current relationship on a day-to-day basis, then completed hour-long interview sessions about their writing. Seven semantic themes emerged during the study: (1) commitment, (2) involvement, (3) work, (4) uniqueness/specialness, (5) fragility, (6) consideration/respect, and (7) manipulation. Specific findings were that dating couples thematized their relationships around commitment, fragility, and manipulation, while married couples, relatives, and those living together characterized their associations around involvement, work, and respect. (FL)

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Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication

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Relational Communication

Abstract

This naturalistic study employs thematic interpretation as a procedure to unlock the central, core meanings salient in layperson talk and writing about their current relationships. One hundred and eighteen people participated in a total of fifty-five report tasks: individually written logs, dyadic and group conversations. Five types of relations were explored: married couples, romantic dating couples, relatives, live-in friends, and non live-in friendships. Seven semantic themes emerged: (1) commitment, (2) involvement, (3) work, (4) unique/special, (5) fragile, (6) consideration/respect, and (7) manipulation. Each of the themes were described and analyzed by report task and relationship type. Among the findings were that dating couples thematized their relations around commitment, fragility and manipulation, while marital couples, relatives and live-in friendships characterized their associations around the semantic concerns of involvement, work and respect. These themes also were compared to extant research on behavioral and perceived dimensions of relationships.

Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication

Human relationships are talked about frequently in our society. Motion pictures, daytime television serials, talk shows, and the popular press all present diverse characterizations of the nature of human associations.[1] Scholarly interest in human relations include such aspects as (1) the discourse used by relational participants,[2] (2) couples personal idioms,[3] (3) mutual definitions of self and relationship,[4] (4) relationship development,[5] (5) relationship types,[6] and (6) relationship control patterns as expressed through discourse.[7]

While there has been much popular and scholarly attention devoted to relationship development, types and definitions, a number of issues about relationships are comparatively unexplored. For as Wilmot has suggested, relational research has specialized in "(1) observing others' episodes and concluding what the behavior means and (2) assessing participant perspectives on past transactions without coupling those definitions to observable episodes."[8] What he claims is missing in these studies is an understanding of the participants' meanings for their relational episodes.[9] The purpose of the present study is in part a response to Wilmot's call for greater awareness of the participants' own meanings for relational episodes by establishing a naturalistic procedure for discovering the meanings people have for current relationships, as those meanings are discoverable in layperson discourse.

Several researchers from psychology, sociology and speech communication have attempted to identify common dimensions or themes of interpersonal relations. Triandis, Vassiliou and Nassiakou had American and Greek respondents rate one hundred role relationships for the appropriateness of one hundred twenty behaviors (e.g., kissing, helping, showing concern for, agreeing with).[10] Using factor analysis, these researchers identified four dimensions common to both cultures: affect (e.g., helping, rewarding, compliments), intimacy (e.g., petting, kissing, loving), dominance (e.g., apologizing, feeling superior to), and hostility (e.g., cheating, quarrelling with). In 1970, sociologists Marwell and Hage elicited ratings of one hundred role relations (e.g., father-son, landlord-tenant) on sixteen scales which identified characteristics of relational interaction.[11] Factor analysis identified intimacy as the most significant dimension, with visibility and regulation of behavior as other dimensions. Wish, Deutsch and Kaplan had subjects rate twenty-five "typical" role relations (e.g., between close friends, between nurse and invalid) and twenty "own" relations (e.g., between you and your mother, between you and your teachers) on fourteen bipolar scales (e.g., very cooperative to very competitive, very tense to very relaxed).[12] These researchers used a multidimensional scaling analysis to identify four dimensions: cooperative-friendly versus competitive-hostile, equal versus unequal, intense versus superficial, and socioemotional-informal versus task-oriented and formal. Finally, Bochner, Kaminski and Fitzpatrick asked subjects to respond to Lorr and McNair's Interpersonal Behavior Inventory by rating how often fourteen

behaviors were manifested for "self," and for "self-best-liked other," and "self-least-liked other" relations.[13] They found the control dimension accounted for most of the explained variance, although over fifty percent of the variation could not be explained. These studies share the following: (1) each sought commonalities or dimensions of subject perceptions, (2) each presented subjects with bipolar scales to assess these perceptions, and (3) each asked subjects to rate imagined or past relationships. The results of these studies offer pertinent insights and some common dimensions of relational life. For example, the control dimension is represented by dominance, hostility, regulation of behavior, and competitive hostility. The affect dimension is manifested by displays of compliments, and cooperation, and is closely allied to the commonly found intimacy dimension. These findings also support earlier dimensions, such as those identified by Schutz (inclusion, control and affection),[14] and Leary's circumplex (domination—submission, affection-hostility).[15] This accumulated corpus of findings can be extended and expanded, however, by exploring detailed verbal descriptions participants give for their current relational situations. Such an exploration calls for a qualitative, naturalistic perspective.

Naturalistic inquiry is characterized by the conduct of researchers in their treatment and perspective taken of data collection, and analysis.[16] Such research, whether quantitative or qualitative, strives for what Willems calls a low manipulation of antecedent conditions in the research setting, and a low imposition of units of analysis.[17] A qualitative naturalistic

study of relationship discourse would add to our understanding of relational life by exploring in detail participant meanings for current episodes. Such a study would need to preserve the complex depth of participant dialogue, so that natural themes of discourse would emerge, and could be interpreted and translated with enough detail to enable readers to determine both how themes thread throughout the discourse, and how these meanings define, shape and manifest relationships. This study elicited detailed, lengthy talk about relationships from a variety of participants in a variety of contexts. It was assumed that by straightforwardly and unobtrusively asking people to discuss their relations, the resultant discourse would provide material which, when analyzed, would reveal the dominant semantic dimensions or themes characterizing their current concerns. From the studies reviewed above, we know much about the range of dimensions of relational life. The present study explores the central semantic themes presently talked about by participants. Thus, the research question which guided this study was: What are the themes of communication people use to characterize their relationships?

Method

During a year of data collection two goals were important. One goal was to elicit discourse used by participants to describe their relations with minimal obtrusion. A second goal was to collect a corpus of talk from different types of persons and relationships, participating in diverse self reports. This latter goal especially was important because several researchers

have found that perceptions of relationships vary with different stages of relationships, with age, and within different relational types.[18] Thus, a multi-participant, method, and report task approach was followed in this study.

A form of "network sampling" was used,[19] which incorporated "contact persons" in the selection of the 118 participants utilized in this study. Seventy-six contact persons were volunteers from the author's classes, relatives, friends, and colleagues. These persons were instructed to find subjects in order to diversify the sample in: age, sex, ethnicity, education, occupation, marital status and duration of relationship.[20]

A total of fifty-five self reports were collected. There were three types of reports: (1) twenty-nine audiotaped dyadic discussions, (2) twelve audiotaped group discussions, and (3) fourteen written relationship logs. These self reports totaled almost seventeen hours of taped conversations and 201 written pages of logs. Both audiotaped tasks asked participants to talk about their relationships for about thirty minutes, stimulated by several topics appearing on an instruction sheet.[21] Dyadic discussants were romantic couples, roomates, relatives, fellow employees, and so forth. Group participants involved three or more persons as families, dormmates, housemates, and social gatherings. The relationship log asked individuals to write about a current relationship by reporting what was done together each day and then to describe their relation based on that day's interaction. In addition, one-hour interviews with three log writers were held following the general guidelines of Zimmerman and Wieder's diary diary-interview method.[22]

Five types of relationships were involved in these report tasks. The researcher assigned each report a type based on how the participants defined their own current relational situation, and on the context of their report. For example, a man and woman who were dating would be typified as a romantic dating couple, while another mixed-sex dyad who perceived themselves as "just friends" would be so categorized. Adding this contextual factor into the typifying process was thought to go beyond extant categorization based on placement along a continuum of intimacy,[23] thus allowing fruitful comparisons. The five relationship types were: (1) thirteen married couples, (2) ten romantic dating couples, (3) eleven sets of relatives (e.g., aunt-nephew/niece, four families with children present in the report, sibling-sibling, parent-son/daughter), (4) ten sets of live-in friends (e.g.,three housemate, seven dormate relations), and (5) eleven non live-in friends (e.g., classmates, fellow employees, same and opposite-sex "fun" relations).

Thematic Interpretation

The goal of this study was to identify the semantic perceptions thematizing relationships. To accomplish this goal, procedures needed to be developed to distinguish themes from other perceptions, while preserving the rich detail of participant talk. The definition of theme in this study relates to Hess and Handel's as a "pattern of feelings, motives, fantasies and conventionalized understandings grouped about some locus of concern which has a particular form in the personalities of the individual members."[24]

A relational theme was conceptualized as the semantic issue or core locus of concern around which a couple's interaction centered. The task was to develop procedures for unlocking these meanings or themes. In adopting a thematic rather than a dimensional approach, it was felt that themes were a more pertinent way to cast relational meanings because, like the theme of a song, or the thesis of a book or essay, a couple's concept of their relationship would be clearly presented in focal, salient issues bound by temporal, stage and other specific, current relational happenings. While dimensions assess the range of behaviors and perceptions, themes offer a glance—a specific view—into the meanings important to people during particular relational moments.

The value of thematic interpretation has been recognized in other contexts. Bochner, in his review of family communication literature, asserts the concept of family theme as "provocative."[25] Jules Henry's naturalistic study of families identified such themes as love, death, and hope as dominant issues expressed in family discourse.[26] Hess and Handel's study of "family worlds" also showed how themes differed within and between families across time.[27] The most frequent use of thematic interpretation in speech communication, however, has been Ernest Bormann's "fantasy theme analysis."[28] Bormann suggests that rhetorical critics may make a fantasy theme analysis by: (1) collecting communication content (e.g., video or audio tapes, manuscripts), (2) describing dramatic incidents, (3) looking for patterns of characterizations, and (4) creatively reconstructing the single symbolic reality or "rhetorical vision" from representative fantasy themes.[29]

This study was informed by the aforementioned research utilizing thematic interpretation, but since no extensive methodological procedures were found, they were developed. Given the definition of a theme abstracted from the literature as the central semantic issue or core content around which a relationship's interaction centers, the author generated theme criteria and interpretive methods. A theme was interpreted as discourse characterized by each of these criteria: (1) recurrence or frequency of mention, (2) repetition of key words or phrases, and (3) emphatic forcefulness of expression. The first criterion, recurrence or frequency of mention, meant that participants must return in a part of their report with discourse exemplifying the same relational meaning. Thus, at least two parts of a report must suggest the same thread of meaning. This criterion allowed salient meanings to be discovered in the foreground of the report—a theme, while other meanings remained in the background. For example, one female college student wrote for fourteen days in a log about her relationship with a high school girlfriend, which suggested the theme "relationship as unique/special."[30]

> Day One: She is an ideal friend. I haven't really known her for very long, but it seems like we jumped into the middle of a relationship. I feel like I've known her forever.
>
> Day Three: That night we burnt chocolate-chip cookies and drank white wine, and for the <u>first</u> time since Bud died [her brother], I had someone I could relate to.
>
> Day Five: <u>Special</u> is the word-of-the-day. It's like Debbie and I share a secret no one knows. Her Grandma would rattle on (I love her dearly) and Debbie would look across at me and wink. She is so <u>special-we</u> are so <u>special</u>! We have the perfect relationship.

These log entries coalesce around a thematic meaning of relational uniqueness. Other meanings, however, are present. For example, in the first day's entry this woman indicated how her relationship was formed suddenly or impulsively (. . . "we jumped into the middle of a relationship."). In the third day's entry, she revealed how her partnership was consoling or supportive (. . . "for the first time since Bud died, I had someone to relate to."). The important point is that these meanings are fleeting, do not recur, and are thus in the background of this person's report. Conversely, her perceptions that their relationship was "ideal," that she felt like "I've known her forever," that "for the first time" she could relate grief of her brother's death, and that they could "share a secret no one knows" centered her perceptions around a core meaning of relational uniqueness.

Not only does this quote, and the remainder of this woman's log, exemplify the criterion of recurrence, in this case a meaning threading throughout a two-week period, but it also shows an example of criterion two; namely, repetition of key words, phrases or sentences. The use of the word "special" above was mentioned first on day five, and was repeated on three subsequent days of the participant's log. Other key words and phrases listed above and repeated later in her log were: "ideal friend," "I've known her forever," "the first time," and the notion of "sharing secrets." Another example of criterion two is indicated in a thirty-minute conversation by a family comprised of a mother, father, son, and daughter. The mother observed: "We're not on <u>top</u> of one another--saying: 'Well, what're we gonna do next?'" The father responded: "I think the word for that would be '<u>space</u>'-

we give each other 'space'-we call it: 'quiet time'--just certain things we decide to go off to do our own thing." To which the mother replied: "We're not on top of one another." The repetition of the key words and phrases "space," "on top of," "go off to" and others not mentioned here indicated the thematic meaning of "involvement in the relationship."

Lastly, the third criterion developed to identify themes in self reports was the emphatic forcefulness of the discourse. By that I mean vocal inflection, volume or dramatic pauses which served to highlight or separate utterances from other locutions in the oral reports, and the underlining of words and phrases, the increased size of print or use of colored marks circling or otherwise focusing on passages in the written reports. The assumption here was that participants themselves could and did centralize meanings for their relations by the form of their expression. For example, in a fifty-year marriage between an eighty year-old man and a seventy-four year-old woman, the man exemplified the theme "commitment to the relationship." The italicized passages "devoted," "fifty-fifty," "one hundred percent," "no end," and "no bounds" reflect the vocal forcefulness of this man's perceptions, highlighting relational commitment.

> M: We've been married for fifty years and we love each other and we're devoted, and we have affection for each other, and we're nice people. We're not some people who give fifty-fifty. I go one-hundred percent. If it's only fifty-fifty, that's no bargain-you're not helping your relationship-you must go all out--one hundred percent. Ours is better because my love for her knows no end-knows no bounds. I want her to--to have-to live right-to be happy. That's all I care about-that's what I'm living for. Everyone has a different relationship-lives differently. Our friends think we're far better than we really are.

The above description of how the three criteria were created and applied gives an idea of how themes were developed by distinguishing them from other background meanings which were not thematized. The researcher examined fifty-five oral and written reports by applying these criteria to each report three times. With each interpretation, reports were scrutinized with greater intensity,[31] so that dominant thematic meanings subordinated less salient meanings within relationships, and common themes were noted across various types of relationships. Thus, the themes presented in this study were generated by what Kenneth Burke terms the "essentializing mode of interpretation,"[32] with the themes being the essential meanings of a relationship at a particular point in time.

Interpretive Themes in Relational Communication

Seven essential, dominant meanings or themes unfolded as a result of the extensive interpretation of the fifty-five self reports. The seven themes were: (1) commitment, (2) involvement, (3) work, (4) unique/special, (5) fragile, (6) consideration/respect, and (7) manipulation. There were 145 thematic characterizations, indicating more than one theme was discovered on the average across all of the reports. Table 1 gives the number of reports which contained oral or written interaction indicating the respective themes, along with the percentages of reports characterizing each theme. Only one theme, relationships as unique/special, was discovered in over fifty percent of the reports. The fact that over eighty percent of

the reports, however, indicated that uniqueness emerged in dyadic discussions, and over fifty-eight percent were reports given by married and dating couples reveals a more interesting finding. A fruitful set of comparisons, therefore, would be to discern the themes characteristic of the three self report contexts and the five types of relationships. Tables 2 and 3 give such a breakdown. Thus, what follows is a description of the seven themes, and an analysis of the nature of the context and relational types in which particular themes emerged.

Commitment to the Relationship

The commitment theme was discovered in twenty-one (thirty-eight percent) of the fifty-five self reports. Commitment was defined as the judgment by one or both participants to begin or continue their relationship, as well as the decision about the type or definitional nature of that association. Participants questioned <u>whether</u> to commit, <u>how much</u> commitment to give, or perceived an <u>assumed</u> commitment to certain relationships. Few descriptions included such phrases as "falling in love," or "finding myself in a relationship." Rather, people giving this meaning indicated they had conscious control of being "in" or "out" of relationships. A man and woman who had cohabitated for five years indicated how they responded to the question of whether to commit to each other.

F: One thing that's very important to me-in all my friendships of substance-it's <u>very</u> important for me to believe beyond a shadow of a doubt that <u>both</u> of us sincerely want things to be-'OK'-

M: Yeh, it's gotta be a two-way thing.

TABLE 1

Frequency of Reports by Themes

Themes	Number of Reports Containing Themes	Percentage of Reports Containing Themes
Commitment	21	38.2
Involvement	26	47.3
Work	19	34.6
Unique/Special	31	56.4
Fragile	22	40.0
Consideration/ Respect	18	32.7
Manipulation	8	14.5
Total	145	

TABLE 2

Frequency of Themes by Report Tasks[a]

Themes	Report Tasks			
	Logs	Dyadic Discussions	Group Discussions	Total
Commitment	4 (19.1)	10 (47.6)	7 (33.3)	21
Involvement	8 (30.8)	10 (38.5)	8 (30.7)	26
Work	2 (10.5)	5 (26.3)	12 (63.2)	19
Unique/Special	2 (6.5)	25 (80.6)	4 (12.9)	31
Fragile	2 (9.1)	20 (90.9)	0 (0.0)	22
Consideration/ Respect	7 (38.9)	10 (55.6)	1 (5.5)	18
Manipulation	6 (87.5)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	8
Total	31 (21.3)	81 (55.9)	33 (22.8)	145

[a]Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages of themes in the three report tasks.

TABLE 3

Frequency of Themes by Type of Relationship[a]

Themes	Relationship Types					
	Married Couples	Romantic Dating Couples	Relatives	Live-in Friends	Other Friends	Total
Commitment	4 (19.0)	10 (47.6)	3 (14.3)	3 (14.3)	1 (4.8)	21
Involvement	8 (30.8)	1 (3.9)	5 (19.2)	9 (34.6)	3 (11.5)	26
Work	6 (31.5)	1 (5.3)	7 (36.8)	2 (10.5)	3 (15.9)	19
Unique/ Special	11 (35.5)	5 (16.2)	3 (9.6)	3 (9.6)	9 (29.1)	31
Fragile	11 (50.0)	10 (45.5)	0 (0.0)	1 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	22
Consideration/ Respect	11 (61.2)	2 (11.1)	2 (11.1)	1 (5.5)	2 (11.1)	18
Manipulation	0 (0.0)	6 (75.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	8
Total	51 (35.2)	35 (24.1)	20 (13.8)	19 (13.1)	20 (13.8)	145

[a] Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages of themes by type of relationship.

F: It's different with us-now-it's very different now. I'm starting to feel conscious again. I'm starting to-willing to admit that I'm in the relationship and that it's intentional, and starting to be willing to plan. I was totally unwilling to do any of those things in the beginning. I was not even willing for a year to admit that I was involved in a relationship-

M: [interrupting]-that's right, me too-

F: -and was not willing to make any kinds of plans at all. I did not want to be involved--my life was real complicated. I just did not wish to be involved in a relationship. I could be an anthropologist and go off to Africa for two years, and come back, and it [the relationship] would be there. No matter what would happen it would be there--it would not be less than it is now.

Both the question of whether to commit and the degree of commitment to the relationship emerged in this dyadic conversation. The meaning "commitment" threaded throughout the thirty-one minute discussion as exemplified both by the woman's recurring concern for being "in" the relation, and the repeated claim that she now was willing to "admit" to being committed, to the extent that she could "plan." As the talk unfolded, "to plan" meant that the two would count on one another being there even after lengthy separation ("two years in Africa"). The forceful, repetitive nature of her being "willing" to "plan" and "admit" to her partner her intentions of commitment showed a resolution of the question of commitment, as well as an indication of the degree of commitment—a perception shared by her partner: "Yeh, it's gotta be a two-way thing . . .that's right, me too." The woman above appeared to be telling her partner she was committed to their relationship, perhaps hoping he would respond with an equal degree or level of commitment. Thus, some couples

have a commitment quotient that must be met if the relation is to continue. A woman who compared two men with which she had had extra-marital affairs wrote in her log about the failure to meet this commitment quotient.

> F: I just learned how not to be so selfish and give up what I need sometimes. I just learned that I want someone that's a little more caring and a little bit more giving than Sam. I thought I was selfish, but I never thought--That guy has probably laid just about every girl in the western hemisphere, and that's just how he looks at it-just another lay. . . . Dick was always saying: 'What will we do?, what will we do?' Always 'us' and 'we' --Sam was always: 'What will I do?, what will I do?'--Always 'me' and 'my.' I just need a break-I'm tired of it.

At the end of her log, and at the end of her relationship with Sam, she summarized the lack of equal commitment in their relation.

> F: I think this whole relationship has been based on a lot of things not said, and this morning we didn't say much. Now he won't look me in the eye-he just looks away-I read into that one of two things. Either he's recently been with another woman, or he misses his freedom and regrets getting too heavily involved with me. I'm too much of a romantic, and he wasn't enough of a man.

The quotation above indicated a woman's belief that the end of her relationship was due to her lover's inability to make a commitment to her. This account illustrates different levels of commitment between partners. She thought he was unable or unwilling to give enough commitment—"he wasn't enough of a man"—since he cared more for his own "freedom," and for being with "another woman." Moreover, the frustration exemplified by the woman reveals one part of what can be called an accordian effect: a person commits to a relationship, it ends due to unequal commitment, and then the once-committed person refuses to make any further commitments. Interestingly, each of three group discussions among housemates comprised of three women each displayed this phenomenon, as exemplified in excerpts from one conversation.

F_1: I go through phases of a degree of wanting to be alone-lately I feel I could be a--nun-that's why I'm going to Alaska for thirty days-to be a nun [all laugh].

F_2: So it's feast-uh famine after the feast huh Terri?!

F_1: Harry called me Monday and wanted to see me, and I was busy, and he called me Tuesday at work, and wanted to get together, and I already had plans and then tonight he wanted to call me after this was over if there's enough time, and I told him no-nooo-I just don't-I'm in a phase right now where I just don't want to put a lot of emphasis with-with a man--I just made up with this guy in-what?-November or December?-and I'm not feeling like I want to put energy into it. I don't feel weird or anything-I feel ok. I just don't feel like putting the energy into a man right now. I feel like putting it into myself right now. Right now my relationship is with myself.

Four group discussions involving one extended and three nuclear families indicated commitment was assumed. For example, the youngest participant in a discussion among a three-generation family said: "I was talkin' earlier about spending your life with somebody-it's hard to be tied down isn't it?" His grandfather replied: "Well, you certainly don't think of it like that if you have a good marriage--'cause you're not tied down." The grandfather accepted an assumed commitment, while his unmarried grandson seemed to define such commitment as excessive. Married and family relations were described as ones in which commitment was unquestioned. Moreover, not only were marital and family relations described as types with an assumed commitment, but these descriptions came from oral reports given by married, and older members of families participating in these reports. For example, in a family group discussion (mother, father, son and daughter) this assumed commitment is thematized.

Mother: I think people are naturally monogamous.

Son: You mean they naturally want a companion, and are happy with one person?

Mother: Yeh, to spend their time with one person. I think Peter and I both were very concerned about our children-I think they came first.

Father: For a period of our lives we devoted all of our time practically--

Mother: For four or five years we gave up our social life so that things would come out right for the kids. I just said to your mother [her mother-in-law] today, I think that when people get married they should be very careful that that is the one person they want to live with for the rest of their life.

The finding that married, older persons from diverse families thematized family relationships as requiring an unquestioned commitment sets the stage for other comparisons involving this theme. An examination of Tables 2 and 3 indicates the frequencies of expression of this theme by report tasks and types of relationships. Of the total reports of this theme, commitment was most frequently discovered in dyadic and group discussions, mostly by dating couples, sets of relatives and live-in friends. One explanation for the occurrence of this theme in dyadic and group conversations is found in the relationship types in these reports. For example, all ten of the dyadic conversations involved unmarried romantic couples. Of the seven group discussions, four were families and three were sets of live-in female housemates. Furthermore, all four of the logs expressing commitment were written by individuals in marital relationships. Therefore, an appropriate generalization is that relationships most concerned with commitment are romantic dating couples, persons just terminating romantic associations, and families. It seems likely that dating couples

would be interested both in whether their partners would continue to want to be a part of the relationship, and in the degree or level of commitment exhibited by each. In fact, unequal commitment often was cited as the reason for romantic breakups,[33] and was especially noted in each of the reports by the three groups of three-woman housemates. This finding appeared to occur because each of these female groups often talked of relations they had had in the past which had failed. Hence, "lack of commitment" was cited as the reason for these failures. Finally, although this entire study elicited reports from only four complete families (i.e., with children living at home and present during the report), each expressed at least this one theme. Perhaps the fact that since their children were present, these parents wished to inculcate them with the values surrounding committed relations. While the specific intentions of these participants varied, there was a commonly held perception that commitment to relationships is a central, core meaning thematized in early stages of romantic dating, in romantic terminations and the talk about such disengagements, and in the recollections of concern voiced by family elders to their offspring.

Involvement in the Relationship

The involvement theme was found in twenty-six (forty-seven percent) of the self reports. Involvement was defined as the quality and quantity of talk, time spent together, and the perceptions of "sharing," which indicated either under or over-involvement. Just as participants had clear notions of how much commitment they desired, they had specific opinions about the

nature of their interaction. Involvement was perceived as a problem to be solved, or question to be answered. Participants sought a balanced involvement in the sense of the time partners spent together. Some felt under-involved and thus wanted to increase involvement, which often was perceived to be remedied by "talk." A couple with two children who had been married two years manifested this aspect of involvement.

> M: What can we say? That we're married, that we're lovers and that we're parents-competitors, companions, friends-we bowl, play pool, cards, Othello. We have a lot of activities like that, that we both participate in <u>together</u>. We also have activities that only one of us participates in, so our relationship has provisions for one of us or both of us <u>going off</u> to do things alone.
>
> F: We always know the other one is there to <u>talk</u> to--we try not to forget that we're here to <u>help</u> each other get through things. Bill sometimes gets <u>too</u> involved with his school work, and I'm involved taking care of the kids. A few days later we'll wake up to the fact that we haven't <u>talked</u> --and we sometimes take each other <u>for granted</u>, and we try not to do that.
>
> M: Yes, I think our relationship is an <u>open</u> one in which we <u>communicate</u>-we communicate our feelings about things that are going good and things that are going bad. We share our feelings <u>together</u>, and that's important to keep a relationship strong.
>
> F: Yeh, that's neat. I guess we're <u>together</u>, but we also go off to do our own thing [laughs].--As long as we <u>talk things out</u>, like the other day--good and bad-we'll be ok.

A salient core meaning for this couple was the restoration of a proper balance of involvement. The ebb and flow of doing things together (e.g., "pool, cards, Othello") and apart (e.g., . . ."involved with his school work," "involved taking care of the kids") thematized involvement throughout this twenty-minute report, and further was exemplified by repetition of such key words and phrases as "going off, go off," and "<u>together</u>."

Interestingly, the forceful expression of "<u>together</u>," "talk, communicate," and "talk things out," shows this couple's judgment that "talk" was the remedy of under-involvement, and served as a way to bring them "<u>together</u>" (. . ."we'll wake up to the fact that we haven't <u>talked</u>").

Since the man quoted above worked part-time in computer sales, as well as being a full-time student, and the woman worked part-time as a computer operator, as well as caring for the two children, it comes as little surprise that a central meaning in their relationship was insufficient involvement. In fact, as Table 3 indicates, eight of the twenty-six reports (over thirty percent) manifesting this relational meaning were given by married couples. This means that most of the married couples (eight of thirteen) manifested this theme. A close examination of these eight reports showed that each illustrated under-involvement, and each was comprised of two working spouses, although only two couples had children still living at home. Perhaps then, a couple's economic situation restricts the quality and quantity of their involvement. Perhaps too, romantic dating couples, who, it can be asserted, are economically and socially more independent than married persons, neither require nor want as much involvement. The fact is, only one of the ten (about four percent of all involvement characterizations) dating couples revealed involvement as a present core meaning. Dating couples appear to be in a relational stage in which commitment becomes a focal meaning, rather than involvement, which is a meaning pertinent to later relationship stages.

Participants characterized over-involvement with terms such as "pinching," "smothering," and "cramping each other's style." A nineteen year-old woman, who wrote daily in her log over a three-week period, described the relationship with her twenty year-old dormate as over-involved.

Day One: I feel comfortable with our friendship, but I think it would be nice to not be around each other quite so much.

Day Two: I think it's good that we more-or-less let one another alone today simply because it's nice to have some time to yourself —to think.

Day Five: Kathy and I saw quite a bit of each other today—about 4 1/2 hours total! I almost think we saw too much of each other. I guess I could describe our relationship today as being in sort of a rut.

Day Six: I don't like to be around the same person too much. It's almost like we'd been friends too long. There was nothing new to talk about—it was the same thing day in and day out—that's what I mean by being in a rut.

While married couples viewed their time apart as under-involvement solved by and through "talk," the log entries above indicated how over-involvement threatened a live-in dormate relationship. This woman felt the constraining pressure of over-involvement, noting recurring perceptions of wanting to "not be around each other," to "let one another alone," and to avoid seeing "too much of each other." Table 3 shows nine of the twenty-six reports (about thirty-five percent) manifesting involvement were live-in relations. Of this number, seven reports indicated over-involvement, with the remaining two (two sets of three female housemates each) being concerned with increasing their low involvement. Moreover, five reports (nineteen percent), all characterizing over-involvement, were offered by relatives living in a single household (two families

with children, one sister-sister, one mother-daughter, and one mother-son). Thus, over-involvement was salient particularly in relational contexts in which persons lived together, as in the dormate situation explained above, or in families. As two sisters described their family, one noted: "Ours is like the TV show: 'Too Close for Comfort!'" The other replied: "Yeh, Dad's too close!" The involvement theme appears, therefore, to constitute a salient meaning especially for married couples with two working spouses (under-involvement), and live-in housemates, dormates and families with children (over-involvement).

Relationships as Work

The work theme was discovered in nineteen (thirty-five percent) of the total self reports. Work was defined in two ways. First, work was the perceived amount of effort, struggle, sacrifice or energy required to begin and maintain relationships. Second, relationships were perceived as analogues to businesses, or business transactions. Participants viewed relations as objects to be "worked on," to be "constructed," as in "building a relationship," and in the sense of "talking things out," "working things out," "sacrificing the ups and downs," and "enduring the hardships" of relating.[34] A couple who had been married thirty-nine years recounted their relationship as requiring work.

F: A lot of times we just let things go, without making decisions--just letting it grow or develop, or take a 'back seat.' We dwell on things sometimes.

M: We do procrastinate quite a bit. I'd just as soon not make any decisions-

F: [interrupting]-so I tend to be the 'family nagger' --a little exasperated at times, and sometimes pushing things to the deadlines like April fifteenth, which you know is only six weeks away. I got it on tape now-you've been reminded! [laughs]

M: One reason why we have the-compatibility we do is that we both have a relationship with God-that strengthens our own relationship.

F: Another thing that's helped me is all the retreats we've been on. Like Father Pressley's retreat--like that couplet he uses you know-: 'Two men looked out of prison bars, one saw mud and one saw stars, and I think we both tend to see the stars and not dwell on those sides of--we know we'd get our feet wet in the mud once in a while but-a little dirty-but we don't dwell on it-we really look up, find the positive things and build on those.

M: Yeh, I think so. It's been tested-problems with the children, but now it's been strengthened, it's more adaptable.

In this twenty-nine minute conversation, this couple reviewed how their relationship had been "tested," yet "strengthened" by the efforts required to rear their children and in maintaining their partnership. The woman recalled the "couplet" told by her priest as an analogue to their relationship. To "dwell on" troubling incidents meant to get their "feet wet," to be mired in the "mud," rather than to "look up" to "see the stars." Work was thematized in this couple's speech in metaphorical terms, but other participants gave more direct expressions. One group of three female housemates interviewed by the researcher gave both direct and metaphorical descriptions.

Interviewer: [So, how would you describe your relationships here in the house?]

F_3: This roomate relationship-this house relationship, it flows. We don't waste a lot of our energy being angry with one another-it flows. We all know what the outcome of anger would be-how energy wasting it would be.

F_1: To just-after I don't know how many years of livin' all these different kinds of households-all of a sudden you get into a house like this-it's just like finally-finally it's something that's working, it's clicking. It's not something I spend a lot of time getting exasperated about--finally a good combination!

F_2: You know the idea that this house is not draining is really an important idea. There's one spot in your life that is not pulling you down [draining all your energy away?] Yeh, 'cause you can spring from that base.

Interviewer: [What about your relationships with people outside the house?]

F_3: Peter, he drains me so much-draining-yeh, he takes a lot of energy, and yet he fills me up a lot, he gives me a lot back. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it-usually.

In both of the preceding discussions, the participants voiced a strong sense of frustration, "exasperation," and "work." In the latter report, the observation that relations required "working on" in order to "work" threaded among the conversation in a recurring, reciprocal motif of "draining" and "pulling," in the sense of expending effort, and of "finally working," "clicking," "flowing" and "filling" each other up, in the sense of the ease with which some relations gratified participants.

An associated characterization of work was the discovery that participants sometimes viewed their relationships as analogues of businesses or business-like activities. Not only did people attend to their relations so they would "work out," but they also viewed them as institutions or objects needing to be "built,"or "constructed" like a house, a business, or even a "nest" or "homebase." For example, in a group discussion among two married couples, one couple illustrated their relationship as working on a "job."

M: It's like your job. If you want to get paid every week, you gotta be there every week, and if you expect to reap the benefits of a good relationship, you gotta put into it every day-you can't just say: 'Well, she can handle it this month-I got too many things to do.'

F: It is true. I gotta put in everything I've got into this-it's a lot of hard work-it's not just: 'Happily Ever After'--you just can't get married and it's Fairyland.

M: You gotta constantly be on guard-

F: [interrupting]-'cause if you don't work at it-it's like everything else, you gotta work at it.

M: It's not hard, it's hard work, but not that hard.

F: It's important, you have to build a strong foundation.

M: To even-yeh, establish a good foundation--like a house-you know, you get a house built-you move into it, and you gotta mow the lawn and stuff like that-and oil the squeaky doors. You gotta realize, if you're gonna give at least two years of-of your life to a relationship-you better give all you have and expect it to go a lot farther than just two years. But so many people get married and a year later or a year and a half later they're divorced-they haven't given it enough time or effort.

To the couple above, a relationship was analogous to a job, and like employment, partners get "paid," have to "be there," and have to build a "good, strong foundation." Furthermore, according to the male, merely a foundation is not enough, one needs to nurture and maintain it ("mow the lawn," "oil the squeaky doors"), and plan to put "enough time" into it. Perhaps then, the world of work or employment has permeated the world of personal relations, since the vocabulary of the former in part has infringed on the latter.[35]

An examination of Tables 2 and 3 shows some interesting comparisons. First, all twelve of the group discussions manifested relationships as work. The twelve conversations comprised four

families with children present, three mixed-sex and one same-sex (male) classmate groups, three female housemate groups, and one group discussion among acquaintances at a cocktail party. Due to the diversity of these participants, an explanation for the manifestation of relationships as work is difficult. It may be that "working on relationships" is a widely agreed upon conclusion shared as a cultural fact. According to Table 3, six of the ten married couples, and seven of the eleven reports given by relatives offered definite prescriptions to the effect that relational success was not a given—it must be "worked out," and "worked for." A poi[illegible] passage from one couple's conversation revealed how they had "e[illegible]d" fifty years of marriage.

F: Through the ups and downs of life.

M: The ups and downs of fifty years of marriage you might say.

F: We just want to be a good example to our grandchildren--and that's what I'm living for.

In fact, since only one of the ten dating couples indicated this theme, it may be that "working on relationships" is a core meaning only for those persons who have been faced with the task of "working a relationship out" (e.g., married couples, families with children, people with extensive dating experience). This theme, therefore, was indicated in married couples' talk as affirmations of their success in "working out" their relational difficulties, in relatives' advice to their lesser-experienced children, and in live-in and other cohort discussions in which talk centered on how best to improve past dating performance.[36]

Relationships as Unique/Special

The salient meaning that relations were perceived as unique or special was identified in thirty-one (about fifty-six percent) of the total self reports, representing the most pervasive theme. Uniqueness or relational specialty was defined as the perception of uncommon, unusual, irregular, and surprising characteristics of relationships. While some participants described their relations as "traditional," "interchangeable," "typical," and "boring," others perceived them as "unique," "special," "elite," "rare," and even "wierd." A recurring aspect of this theme was the view that certain topics could be discussed only within the "unique" relation. This aspect of uniqueness was illustrated in a thirty-minute conversation between two female friends (one married, one single) who had known one another two years.

F_1 [single]: With my Christian friends, it's real hard to talk about-certain things-like dating and going out-

F_2 [married]: [interrupting]-sometimes I think there's a lot of things I can tell you that I can't even tell my husband-and I do. I think you being from a more of a Christian background makes a difference-usually I'm kinda turned off by people who are real religious, and yet that doesn't happen-I don't know what it is--maybe it depends on how hard someone pushes.

F_1: Yeh, I would never push my faith on someone else--that's personal choice. It's neat-my relationships with men have put me through a lot of struggles-it's nice you present another point of view--it's great!

F_2: Sometimes I'm real nervous about saying some things to you-personal opinions-and after I do, it's real easy to talk to you. I mean even to tell you personal things that might hurt you.

F_1: I feel like I can share about anything with you-more than anyone else I can think of. I think you and Sammy are the only ones-you know-I feel free to share with.

F_2: Thanks.

This same-sex dyad illustrated the uniqueness of their relationship due to the exclusivity of discussable topics. The single woman noted how difficult it was to discuss "dating" relationships with her "Christian friends," and that she could "share about anything" with her friend—"more than anyone else." The married woman echoed this exclusivity, noting how "easy" it was to tell her "personal things," discussing those topics she could not even tell her husband. The repetitive, forceful nature of key words and phrases in this dyad's speech indicated their surprise in realizing this perception. One woman felt how "hard" it was to confide in others and how "great" it was to share "about "anything" with this one friend. The other woman appeared surprised to observe how it was "real easy-to talk" to her friend, even to tell her "personal things that might hurt" her. This point is important because the surprise interpreted in the voices of participants was a defining characteristic of uniqueness. To further clarify this idea, five separate mixed-sex dyads remarked how their relationships were unique because they did not exhibit the usual concern about sexual intercourse. Two of these dyads show this idea. The first had been together for five years (an eighteen year-old man and a seventeen year-old woman), while the second had been friends for eight months (an eighteen year-old man and a twenty year-old woman).

Dyad One

M: After five years-most people don't look at it as a male-female to have such a good relationship without having uh-uh--

F: Sexual contact-I know, it seems kinda strange-people are always asking me if we do anything-or anything.

M: Yeh, they go: 'Oh really?! I'm sure!' you know- friends always giving you those eyes and stuff. It's kinda bad that more people in this world can't b like that. It's just not enough of it I think-just like a regular-like both sex-like two girls or two guys. . . .'The two incredible people in the world!'

F: We're so interesting-'cause there's not that many male-female relationships that are just friends.

Dyad Two

M: If a relationship was a pair of jeans, what would the label be on the back?! [both laugh]

F: 'Elite'-I sometimes wonder what other people would think-'cause you don't see guys and girls hanging around together unless they're-you know--

M: It's like-Mark doesn't want to join in the conversation-like: 'leave the two love birds alone.'

F: I think people don't know what to think--the majority.

M: I don't feel pressure-like romantic relationships. A lot of times you feel obligated.

Table 2 indicates participants in twenty-five of the twenty-nine dyadic discussions cited uniqueness as a major relational meaning. By adding the four group discussions, we see that twenty-nine of the thirty-one expressions of this theme occurred in face-to-face meetings. The highly oral nature of this meaning may show how important it is for participants to inform each other of the special characteristics of their relationships. The five mixed-sex friendship couples exemplified in the above two conversations remarked that they were unique how their relations did not revolve around sexual attraction and intercourse. Prior to this finding, uniqueness was described as a matter of secret talk,

in which participants reported their ability and willingness to discuss important, personal topics with one other person only. Of the remaining four non live-in friendships, two were dyads comprised of two women each. Interestingly, in each of these two dyads the women termed their relations as being "like sisters," and described them in several memorable ways (e.g., "we're like 'Laverne and Shirley,'" "you're my best, most trusted friend, my confidant, my Albanian spy partner."). Moreover, four other conversations (two mother-daughter, two three-woman housemate relations) also noted uniqueness as a function of similarity to "sister" relationships. In the latter type of association, one woman remarked:

> That's the kind of house it is-I sense that it's fairly unique. I really do--I think it's rare what we have-three unmarried women living together.

In stark similarity, another woman in a different housemate situation dichotomized relationships.

> It really breaks down into traditional and non-traditional. Traditional being marriage and the family, and non-traditional-I think it's fairly non-traditional for three women our age [thirty-seven, twenty-eight, and twenty-eight] to be living together-in a group living situation.

Thus, reports of uniqueness often stemmed from perceptions of the types of relationships, with "traditional" and "typical" associations contrasted with "unique" or "non-traditional" ones,[37] of the particular living situation, and of the kind of talk befitting only a certain, singular relationship.

Table 3 indicates eleven of the thirteen married couples reported uniqueness as a current, salient meaning. The surprising tone reflected in these accounts helped to reveal the theme. The expression of this theme unfolded as a descriptive contrast

of "enduring," "solid," "stable," and "surviving" relations, and "shaky," "hopeless" and "rocky" ones. Each of the eleven reports indicated these "hopeless" relationships as the norm, the most common and the inevitable end result facing marriages and other close partnerships, and characterized "enduring" relations (their relationships) as "unique" because they had "survived." These couples shared a common perception of American life: relationships today do not last, and when one does it is remarkably "unique." A couple married for twenty-eight years describe this concept.

M: Our relationship now is certainly-it's like good concrete-it's seasoned and it's solid. One doesn't know how solid a relationship can be until one gets to the end of the road, then you realize how good it can be.

F: When we were first married I was in love with love-now I'm in love with you.

M: Yeh, thanks.

F: It's like Ripley's Believe it or Not book title!-we had our ups and downs-

M: [interrupting]-I thought it was a bed of roses and-it was a bed of thorns.

F: It was 'love in bloom'-the 'blessings of heaven' and then the 'rocky road'--three months of living apart-and then the road smooths.

M: You know, divorce these days is no big deal. Everybody's been divorced at least once-

F: [interrupting]-but, a lot of people don't learn until they've been divorced-then it's too late. It's like you're against all odds.

M: Yeh, it seems most relationships break up eventually.

F: We've been through a lot in these years. We're about out of tape-you know to play this back might sound a little dull.

This couple echoed a common account that "most relationships break up eventually," but that those able to survive "against all odds" could enjoy a "solid" relationship. The key utterances indicating their uniqueness were the realization of just "how solid" their association was at "the end of the road," how it may have appeared in "Ripley's Believe it or Not," and how they had avoided the norm ("everybody's been divorced at least once"). Put simply, these eleven couples were surprised their partnerships were stable, secure and enduring—so much so they labeled their associations as "unique." It may be that some persons seek out a unique quality of relating as a way to safeguard, protect and maintain them against the ultimately fragile nature of personal relationships.

Relationships as Fragile

The fragile theme emerged in twenty-two (about forty percent) of the relational descriptions. Relational fragility was defined as the perception that relationships were fearful, frightening and, ultimately, hopelessly futile. Participants felt that beginning and maintaining relations was "scary," and clearly they feared these associations might end. It is interesting to note that Table 3 shows all of the romantic dating couples, and eleven of the thirteen married couples indicated fragility. The eleven married couples were the same participants who also manifested relational uniqueness, while the ten dating couples identified fear associated with beginning a relationship. As mentioned above, perhaps these married couples pointed to their uniqueness as a way to safeguard their relationships. The ten

dating couples, however, were cognizant of the tenuous fragility of initial interaction. For example, in two dating dyads, the participants expressed a fear of first dates. One couple who had been dating two years explained this fear.

> M: We thought that because of the uniqueness of the relationship such as ours we thought that a few of the subjects could be combined into one.
>
> F: My life has become enriched ever since Don set foot in it-like when we first met. He pulls up in his car and it blew me away!-'cause he honked when he came around the corner and I thought: 'Who is this person?!-I don't know this person!'-then I looked in the car and there he was and said: 'I'm just on my way to the university, want me to drop you off at campus?' I was a little leery and kinda nervous, but I said: 'Sure,' and so he said: "What time's your class?' and I said: '9:30' and he goes: 'Oh, ok.' And then he took a different route and threw me for a loop and I said: 'Oh, I have a meeting with my professor at 9:15' and he said: 'Oh, I'm sorry,' and got back on track. Then he dropped me off, and I was getting out of the car, he reached over and kissed me goodbye, and it totally flabbergasted me and I must of had the most startled look of embarrassment on my face, and I was shaking all the way to school thinking: 'God, what have I got myself involved with?! Was I teasing this person?! Was I leading him on?!'
>
> M: I was nervous, too!

Another woman described her first date with a fearful uncertainty of the proper behaviors.

> F: When we first started the relationship everyone was kinda tentative-like what was acceptable, like with our first date. I got ready three hours early! I didn't know what to do with myself. I was really guarded-and even now. I'm relaxing a lot more.

In the two reports above the fragile, fearful nature of beginning relationships was characterized. One woman perceived this fear of her first encounter as it "blew me away," "threw me for a loop" and totally "flabbergasted me." She examined her actions, questioning whether she had been "teasing" or "leading"

the man on. Similarly, the second woman noted how "tentative" and "guarded" her first date had been. These perceptions are fears and anxieties involved with beginning relationships, but a related perception was the fear associated with terminating them.

While fear of relating was a common perception among the ten dating couples, the eleven married couples voiced a perception that their lives had been littered with so many failed relationships that it left them "fed up," "disgusted," "mad" and "gun shy." When marital partners were called upon to describe their current marriages, these eleven dyads contrasted their relational situations with past terminated relations. Hence, since all eleven had also perceived uniqueness, a dialectic of uniqueness and fragility emerged, whereby "working" successful relations were perceived as abnormal or unique when juxtaposed with the norm of "broken relationships." A couple married for eight years indicate a contrast with past, hopelessly futile or "washed up" relations.

F: At first I was cautious because I didn't expect a relationship to develop between us-a real relationship, and I didn't want to get hurt. I felt like you were looking for someone to treat you like you had been treated by another woman.

M: Yeh, wow that would be terrible!

F: Either that or a 'stop gap.'

M: And when you came up to me and said: 'Sid, I want to talk to you.' Wow, I was scared, and I thought: 'Oh my God, I've messed up again!'

F: I don't know of any relationship similar to ours-'cause I had about decided that all relationships were washed up, and I wasn't interested in being involved in a relationship, before our relationship really started-feeling like yeh-I it is worthwhile and two people can-can care for each other without hurting each other, and destroying each other. Because I didn't know of any relationship that was how I wanted our relationship to be. Now ours is the only one I know of that's anywhere near.

This couple revealed a line of thinking at the core of relational definitions and meanings; namely, that intimate relations are risky at best, that one needs to be "cautious," and wait to see whether a new relationship will be like former ones—"washed up," "hurting" and "hopeless." We can imagine that all relations at one time will focus on this central meaning, but a pattern of expected relational fragility is suggestive. Table 3 indicates twenty-one of the twenty-two total characterizations of fragility unfolded in married and dating couples' reports. Moreover, Table 2 shows that twenty occurrences of this total were found in dyadic, face-to-face discussions. As with the uniqueness theme, fragility appears to possess a uniquely oral form, which may be due to the dialectic of uniqueness and fragility mentioned earlier. These people were not only describing their relationships to complete a research task, but seemed to be searching for or citing some unique or special aspect of their associations, while also explaining to each other how utterly futile former partnerships had been. Married couples know what dating couples suspect: that interpersonal relationships go through nerve-wracking, seemingly "impossible," and futile test points. An engaged couple perceive a test point as a "hump" to get over.

M: I remember after the first couple of weeks I didn't think the relationship was gonna last.

F: You didn't?!

M: No, I really didn't.

F: Billll, you never told me that!

M: After the third or fourth week I thought the relationship would last a lot longer, but there was a little hump that I needed to get over.

The core meaning of relational fragility, therefore, surfaces in early stages of dating relationships as one of these test points, and in comparatively established relations such as marriages as a contrasting meaning to their currently positive, unique association.

Relationships as Consideration/Respect

The consideration/respect theme appeared in eighteen (almost thirty-three percent) of the total reports. Consideration/respect was defined as the judgment by participants of the degree of other-orientation or other-directedness, and the extent of concern expressed by one person for the other in a relationship. Various manifestations of this theme included "doing things for each other," giving each other "praise," "depending on one another," and being "sensitive to each other's needs." The most pervasive indicant, however, involved telephoning or "calling" one's partner to notify them of a "change of plans," especially in marital relationships. A couple married for twenty-four years gave an account of the roles "communication" and "respect" played in their lives.

M: I never <u>had</u> to call up Jenny and see if it was ok. I <u>knew</u> it would be ok. The only reason for a phone call or discussing it was if there was a conflict of plans already made, and if there was no conflict and I knew we were doing nothing and somebody said: 'Let's go play tennis,' I would play tennis. Jenny <u>never</u> hasseled me-<u>never</u> got on my back about spending time with her. And she wouldn't call me at work with little piddly-ass things.

F: That's because you'd <u>call</u> me if I expected you, and you weren't coming home on time.

M: Here's where <u>consideration</u> comes in. I always called

> when it was beyond what time I thought I'd be home. To me, there are two key words: 'communication and consideration,' with communication comes the opportunity for consideration.

Another couple married for seven years illustrated consideration.

> F: Just being able to admit that you might possibly be wrong. I mean you gotta be able to think: 'Where is the other person coming from?' Even though you didn't think you did anything wrong-they've gotta listen to your side of it too: 'Hey, I was busy, I didn't think about it. But next time would you please try to think of my situation--the dinner's been gettin' cold here for two hours. I've been worried to death. I mean, try to put each other in the other's place.
>
> M: Yeh, that consideration just to call-just to say: 'Oh, I'm gonna be late.'
>
> F: Craig never calls Betty if he's gonna be late. You always call me early and let me know what's goin' on 'cause you worry about that, and I'd do the same. We've always pretty much done that.

At first glance this consideration appears to be rather a mundane, everyday meaning, but as the two couples above noted, "consideration" presupposed "communication," which meant one needed to "try to put each other in the other's place." Maintaining telephone contact in cases of a change in expected plans illustrated a kind of layperson empathy. "Calling home" just to say: "Oh, I'm gonna be late," meant the caller had the relationship, and specifically the other person, uppermost in mind. Not surprisingly then, other apparently mundane, daily tasks (e.g., "doing the dishes for me, since I was tired from work") were only symbolic actions for a deeper core meaning for the relationship. Since much of an established couple's partnership can be said to revolve around daily tasks (e.g., balancing the checkbook, washing clothes, purchasing groceries), it is interesting to note that eleven of the thirteen married couples gave characterizations of consideration. Perhaps as some

researchers suggest, consideration is an aspect of companionate love, rather than passionate love,[38] which may account in part for the relatively infrequent emergence of this theme in dating couples (two reports). One might expect consideration/respect to be a core meaning, therefore, in relations best termed "companionate." Indeed, two of the eleven married couples thematizing respect had been married at least fifty years (fifty and sixty-two years), with one man adamantly noting: "Respect one another, because that's the basis of life itself, without that respect you just don't have anything--you need to respect and try to cooperate with one another." Of course this is not to say that marital couples are not "passionate," but rather that salient meanings may shift from concerns of commitment, love, and involvement to concerns of help, support, consideration and respect in later stages of relational life. As the man above said, perhaps consideration and respect means "to cooperate" in the sense of sharing household duties. The "basis of life," then may incorporate simple yet powerful daily consideration for relational pairs.

Relationships as Manipulation

The manipulation theme was discovered in eight (almost fifteen percent) of the total self reports. Manipulation was defined as the perception by participants of active, conscious control of relational resources. Participants noted a sense of "being used" and of "playing games." "To use" another for personal gain was a commonly claimed aspect of this theme, as unfolded throughout a single woman's twenty-eight day log about her dating

relationship.

Day One: I got the impression he was paying more attention to me than normal, enough more to make me uncomfortable and on guard. And I sensed immediately that he wanted more from our friendship than I wanted, more than I am willing to work for with Sandy. I just want to keep our relationship as defined-we are friends.

Day Three: Sandy kept looking at me and touching my knee every so often-which put me in a position to play with him. I obviously had his complete attention, and I feel guilty, but I paid as little attention to him as I could stand. Pure manipulation on my part.

Day Six: Sandy has slipped back into his old ways—no more walking me to and from class, back to little or no touching, extreme nonchalance. I can understand a lot of the 'toning down' because I asked for it. I forced a little small talk out of him. I felt I was interrogating him when I asked how his day had gone. He stopped painting, faced me, diddled a little with his fingers, answered in the shortest possible way, didn't look at me (almost through me).

The woman above manipulated or "played" with her male dating partner by controlling the relational resource "attention."[39] Knowing that "he was paying more attention to me than normal," that "he wanted more," and that she "had his complete attention," she could meter the level of attention given to Sandy. Moreover, Sandy too seemed aware of using attention as a manipulable resource by answering in "the shortest possible way" and by not looking at but instead "through her." By controlling how much time was spent together, and how much eye contact was made, this couple controlled not only these resources, but in turn the definition or major meaning for their association. Manipulation as a core meaning, therefore, was central to the very nature of the relationship itself. "Attention" was not the only

resource, however, used by participants to control relational definitions. Physical contact, sexual innuendo, and "playing games" also threaded through some reports. Participants described manipulation as a way to attract another person, and as a way to keep them "faithful" or "in" a relationship. For example, a woman having an "affair" with a married man wrote in her log about her efforts to keep her lover from "flirting"—and even to "make him crawl."

Day Two: We got to the cabin tonite and are staying with his cousin and wife. This gal [cousin's wife] has made several passes at him (or so he says) so I've been kind of wary around her. He really flirts with her a lot! But I told him in the car before we picked up his daughter that if his cousin ever divorces her and proposed to me that I'd marry him in a minute. He hasn't done too much flirting this evening!

Day Three: At the campfire all of the couples were acting like couples usually do at campfires, and I wasn't really expecting him to be cuddly—he hates to cuddle, and I love to. But, maybe my new found friend [her lover's cousin] got him worried and he was cuddling just like everyone else!!!!

Day Four: Our relationship tends to be fairly vague about 90% of the time, but the other 10% of the time is the best! He can be pretty selfish. He has gone with a lot of women and since we've only been going together for a year, a few of them think that he'll still go out with them. He told me once that he was going with 10 women while he was married, so I've always been really possessive with him.

Day Six: I simply said: 'You know, I think that men can be pretty useless at times too. But more than that I'd watch out where you make the comment of women being useless, because if you say that in a bar, some homosexual could walk up to you and lay a great big kiss on you!' His mouth dropped open and he's never said another word as of yet. Things like that usually make him crawl!

In the log entries above, the woman manipulated her partner by threatening to leave him to marry another "in a minute," and by getting him to "cuddle" with the same threat. By admitting she was "possessive with him" and sometimes making him "crawl" through ridicule, this woman maintained her affair by controlling the extent of physical contact, especially through sexual innuendo. She "flirted" with her lover's cousin as a way to keep him in the relationship, especially given the threat that he had admitted his frequent affairs (. . ."he was going with 10 women while he was married") and "several passes" from his cousin's wife. Thus, this woman manipulated her partner by controlling the relational commodity best termed sexual innuendo. As the woman wrote later in her log, "I decide just when, where and how often we do it [sexual intercourse], and that's how I keep him in line." This sexual game playing served as a central meaning around which many dating relations revolved. A woman in a group conversation among seven college students gave a graphic scenario of such "game playing."

> F: Like games-oh, when you first meet someone you try to act like--a sex goddess or something--hooking him like the Black Velvet ad-the slinky, black dress--it's like the jeans commercial, too. The guy with the hairy chest and the music and the chick's hands moving down--it's manipulative! The whole idea is to get the girl or get the guy--blatant games, like the 'cancelling the date game'-you say: 'Oh, let me check my calendar,' when you really don't have a full calendar, and you say: 'Oh, sorry, let's make it some other time.' It's just games!

By examining Tables 2 and 3, we see that most expressions of manipulation occurred in written logs (six logs or over eighty-seven percent),and weregiven by dating couples (six logs or seventy-five percent). To add to this appraisal, it is interesting to note

that all but one of the total reports were given by women. Hence, a profile of the meaning "manipulation" unfolds mostly as female written descriptions of their dating relations. The written nature of these reports may be due to the powerful impact any discussion of manipulation might have on the present tranquility of the relationship. That is, perhaps manipulation is accomplished more often than it is discussed. It may not be, therefore, a central theme shared by both participants in a relationship. Moreover, the fact that mostly dating women were concerned with manipulation may be a function of how they showed concern for, as one said, "holding onto" a man. This does not necessarily mean that only women manipulate to retain a partner, but at least they thematize relations this way in their talk or writing. Only one male-male dyad manifested this theme thusly: "We were a terror, weren't we?! God, we were a team!! We abuse, we're abusers! Mass girls-man! We abuse, but they like it, you know?!"

Discussion

With the emergence of the seven themes and an analysis of the discovery of these salient meanings in particular relational contexts, implications now can be explored for these findings on extant research. Romantic dating couples in this study were particularly concerned with questions of the presence and level of relational commitment, the fragility of developing new personal relations, and the sense of creating relational uniqueness. Individuals not only search for suitable partners in initial interaction by reducing informational uncertainty,[40] but they also search for commitment messages. They quest for indications

of equal sharing, caring, planning, and other signs of continuing the relationship, so that a kind of commitment quotient is met. This quotient can be satisfied by developing some form of relational uniqueness, such as a song, sharing a secret, or even dressing similarly as a sign of what Knapp calls relationship "integration."[41]

The findings of this study also extend previous research in relationship development. Researchers have recognized communication behaviors vary with perceived changes in intimacy and stages of relationships.[42] For example, scholars have noted that couples develop increasing uniqueness, depth and breadth of interaction, and smoother, more flexible communication as they become more intimate.[43] Dating couples in this study focused their perceptions of communication on themes of commitment, uniqueness and fragility. Conversely, married couples thematized their relational concerns around involvement, work, uniqueness, fragility and respect. Married partners seemed to have resolved questions of commitment due to passage through the ritualized "bonding" stage of marriage,[44] and because of the greater years of experience together than dating couples.[45] Instead, married persons patterned their communication around a locus of concern with the degree of face-to-face involvement. After persons are together a few years their attention turns to more everyday communicative concerns. Married couples cited work, uniqueness, and respect as <u>reasons</u> for their success in the face of an otherwise ultimate fragility, unlike beginning couples who were still questioning whether their relations would survive. So, although both types of relationships were concerned with some of the same themes (e.g., uniqueness and

fragility), these themes were manifested differently, at different times, and for different reasons. The themes involvement, work, and respect especially were predominant in marital couples perhaps because these themes marked both affirmations of relational success, and reflect daily routines that only established relations found salient. In this regard it must be observed that both relatives and live-in friends also thematized involvement and work. Basic issues of the proper amount and quality of interaction or involvement, and of the perception of "working problems out" are concerns that confront persons who live together. Here again, dating couples, and non-live-in friends seldom were concerned with involvement and work, and when they were, the context was one of coming together to increase involvement and to "work out" disagreements. While a developing relationship does follow stages, a thematic meaning surfaces in response to a specific concern for the persons involved. We can take the themes characterized in the discourse of dating couples (commitment, uniqueness, fragility and manipulation) as a cluster of concerns of beginning relations, and the meanings of involvement, work and respect as a cluster evident in more experienced associations (i.e., married and live-in relations). These meanings can be plotted as likely loci of concern reflecting linear movement or trajectory of meaning stages from beginning to more experienced relationships. The findings of this study, however, also show how the trajectory of relationship development is but one point of analysis. As Steven Duck noted: "I begin to wonder whether we can talk of 'the trajectory' of a relationship or whether we should think of and begin to explore the trajectories of several components

to the experience of relationships."[46] Hence, while dating couples generally were more concerned with commitment than married ones, reflecting a linear trajectory of first commitment then involvement, the latter partnerships may later rally around the commitment theme during times of relational distress, when people question commitment as in Knapp's stages of "coming apart" (e.g., differentiating, circumscribing, stagnating).[47] The point is that thematic meanings may emerge in relationships at points all along the trajectory of linear development, and thus offer indices of understanding in addition to knowledge of stages.

How might these seven themes supplement the understanding of relationships offered by the research on dimensions of interpersonal life? The goal of the present study was to remain close to the detailed discourse, and to induce from this communication the salient, central meanings participants held for their current relations. These naturalistic procedures offer semantic themes as layperson categories of many of the abstract dimensions found in extant research. Differences between these themes and dimensions may be a function of the different methodologies. Nevertheless, some comparisons can be suggested from the juxtaposition of these themes and extant dimensions.[48]

The commitment theme most clearly reflects Schutz' inclusion dimension. Inclusion is manifested when one initiates interaction and/or wants to be included with others. As Schutz observes, "inclusion is concerned with the problem of in or out," and "is always concerned with whether or not a relation exists."[49] People manifesting a concern with commitment, such as dating couples, are faced with decisions of whether to be "in or out"

of a relationship, and to what degree to commit to it. Thus, the commitment quotient mentioned earlier is similar to a balance of inclusion needs. One person may be expressing a relatively high level of commitment and may desire similar commitment from the other (e.g., "I'm starting to-willing to admit that I'm in the relationship"), but the other may not be ready for a serious commitment (e.g., "I go through phases of a degree of wanting to be alone . . . right now my relationship is with myself."). Just as one can be "undersocial, oversocial" or "social,"[50] one can be under-committed, over-committed, or committed equally with their partner. Commitment also is expressed in research by Wish, Deutsch and Kaplan, specifically in their dimension "intense versus superficial." Subjects in that study perceived casual acquaintances and "typical" role relations (e.g., salesman and customer) as superficial, while "close friends," "fiancé-fiancée" and family relations were "intense."[51] Commitment is a core meaning which involves a question of whether people will relate superficially (i.e., comparatively under-committed) or intensely (i.e., relatively committed or over-committed). Commitment is a meaning, therefore, which surfaces when people are determining how included or intensely dedicated to be, a matter primarily facing dating couples.

Involvement was defined as the quality and quantity of talk, time spent together, and perceptions of "sharing." Schutz notes that "inclusion is concerned primarily with the formation of the relation, whereas control and affection are concerned with relations already formed."[52] Involvement is a concern of relations

already formed, as already noted in the preponderance of this central meaning in married couples and relatives living together. Involvement relates to Schutz' affection dimension in the sense that one acts "close and personal" and wants "people to get close and personal" with them.[53] Hence, the couple who "wake up to the fact that we haven't talked" and thus complain of under-involvement are saying in effect: "We are drifting apart" and are, in Schutz' terms, presenting an "underpersonal" relation.[54] Conversely, the nineteen year-old woman who wrote about her room-mate complained of over-involvement or an "overpersonal" relation (e.g., "I think it would be nice to not be around each other quite so much."). The "personal" relation is the ideally involved one. Finally, Wish and associates claim their intense-superficial dimension also can be identified as "'intensity' or 'activity,'"[55] noting its similarity to Osgood, Suci and Tannenbaum's "activity" dimension.[56] In the context of that claim, involvement also can be so identified.

The core meaning "work" was defined as the perceived amount of effort or energy required to maintain relations, and as a metaphor for businesses or business transactions. Knapp, Ellis and Williams observe "early relationship stages seem to have a high potential for interaction problems," or "difficulty of interaction."[57] However, only one of ten dating couples in this study exhibited the related core meaning "effort" or "work." Furthermore, none of Schutz' three dimensions seem applicable here, but the Wish study reveals a pertinent finding relevant to relations as "businesses." The work theme appears to fall on the dimension "socioemotional and informal versus task-oriented

and formal." Subjects in that study perceived their relationships with relatives (siblings, mother and father, and in-laws) as socioemotional and informal, while "teachers," "business rivals," and "supervisor-employee" relations were task-oriented and formal.[58] The interesting point here is that the present study revealed a metaphor which placed interpersonal relations on a similar plane as "jobs," or the working world. The predominant expression of "work" emanated from married couples and sets of relatives. This theme emerges in contexts in which participants have comparatively lengthy experience both in interpersonal and professional relations. Thus, it appears the world of employment is infringing on the world of interpersonal relations, with the latter type taking on a task-orientation (e.g., "It's like your job . . . you gotta <u>be there</u> every week").

Relational uniqueness was defined as the perception of uncommon, unusual, and irregular relations. Schutz writes that "to become emotionally close to someone involves, in addition to an emotional attachment, an element of confiding innermost anxieties, wishes and feelings." He continues: "A strong affectional tie usually is accompanied by a unique relation regarding the degree of sharing of these feelings."[59] Uniqueness may be a form of "overpersonal" relationship type in which partners have a "strong anxiety about ever being loved, and basically about being unlovable."[60] Participants in this study illustrated their uniqueness by confiding secrets, and searching for any special bonding agent (e.g., a song, a secret vocabulary or idiom[61]). Moreover, people had an apparent desire to make certain their partners <u>knew</u> how unique they were, since the most frequent mode

of expression of this meaning was oral and face-to-face. Although none of the four dimensions in the Wish study seem directly applicable, it is suspected that uniqueness may cluster around the continua poles labeled "socioemotional and informal, intense, equal, and cooperative and friendly," only because these categories indicate positive, "close" relationships (e.g., "close friends, husband and wife, your spouse," etc.), which also was discovered in this study.[62]

Relational fragility was defined as the perception that relationships were fearful, frightening and futile. Since this theme, like commitment, focused on "whether or not a relation exists," or Schutz' inclusion dimension, dating couples especially focused their attention on this meaning. Beginning couples center on the question of whether their associations will continue, or whether they will ultimately "break down." Interestingly, although no specific dimensions in the Wish study apply, the "cooperative and friendly versus competitive and hostile dimension" was constructed from such scales as "always harmonious versus always clashing, compatible versus incompatible goals and desires, very productive versus very destructive," and "very relaxed versus very tense."[63] Since the persons giving the fragility theme noted the "scary," "tentative" and "guarded" nature of their relations, we can consider this theme as indicating the competitive-hostile pole, and the absence of this fragility as noting the cooperative-friendly pole. Perhaps then, one way dating couples cooperate is through sharing a compatible goal of commitment.

Relational consideration or respect was defined as the judgment of the degree of other-orientation or other-directedness. Consideration is an aspect of Schutz' affection dimension, which he says refers to "close personal emotional feelings between two people. Affection is a dyadic relation."[64] Consideration is dyadic in the sense of cooperation, and the empathic putting "each other in the other's place." Trying to see the other's point of view is a positive fulfillment of the other's need for affection, especially a need for friendship or companionship. In the Wish study, consideration/respect appears on the cooperative and friendly versus competitive and hostile dimension, being constructed of such scale items as "very altruistic versus very unfair."[65] Of interest is the finding that this dimension is "more salient to older than to younger subjects," and "to married than to single subjects."[66] As suggested earlier, the fact that most of the married couples manifested consideration seems to match this part of the Wish results. It can be postulated that the longer couples are together the more they will perceive their relations as "cooperative," "companionate," "friendly" and "respectful."

Manipulation as a thematic meaning was defined as the perception of active, conscious control of relational resources. Schutz identified inclusion and affection as needs participants expressed and wanted about equally. Control, however, involves a differentiation in which a "person who likes to control may or may not want others to control him."[67] By controlling eye contact, attention, physical contact and the promise of sexual involvement,

dating couples, and especially women, in this study manipulated their partners into relationships. Women privately admitted in log entries how they manipulated men into dating relations, thus being what Schutz terms "autocratic."[68] In the Wish study, relatives, close friends, engaged couples, and husbands and wives all were relationships perceived as "equal," with most "unequal" relations being role types (e.g., in-laws, parent-child, teacher-student).[69] Perhaps with the transition from dating to committed marital dyads comes a move from greater to lesser manipulation, and unequal to equal relations.

The themes of communication that emerged in this study appear to further specify and identify many dimensions already discovered. Comparatively new insights unfolded, however, from the specification of themes by relational types and contexts. Dating couples, for example, seemed to focus their relations around commitment and fragility as inclusion needs, with some interest in manipulation. Married couples, relatives and live-in friends focused more on the affection needs of involvement, uniqueness and consideration. Furthermore, the researcher was struck by the fact that married couples expressed on average almost four themes each, while the dating couples gave about three, and the remaining types about two themes each. It can only be speculated that married and dating couples have more to say, or are in periods of greater relational activity. Perhaps the greater instances of themes indicates these relationships reflect upon their relations more often, if not discuss them more frequently than relative, live-in or non-live-in associations. Overall though, the seven themes identified in this study expressed dominant meanings of inclusion and affection,

with only about fifteen percent of all reports indicating control or manipulation as a salient concern. This result is in marked contrast to the previously reviewed dimensions research, which gives control an equal standing beside other dimensions.

Most importantly, however, the dispersion of the seven themes across relationship types and report forms gives only an initial glimpse of how and when salient meanings emerge at different points in the life of relationships. Perhaps the interesting work yet to be done is the tracking of relations from acquaintance to marriage and beyond, as well as closer scrutiny of friendship, vocational and other relational types. Since this exploration assessed only the few themes at the locus of concern for a relationship at one point in time, it is intriguing to speculate on a longitudinal mapping of the ebb and flow of themes across time. Thematic interpretation, therefore, can serve to unlock major, salient, core meanings as they emerge to the foreground, fade out of salience only to return again. We further will understand both relationship development and discourse, and the complex nature of themes themselves by continuing to pursue naturalistic study of relationships.

Notes

[1] See, for example, the daytime television talk shows: Donahue, CBS; Hour Magazine, CBS; The Merv Griffin Show, ABC; Good Morning America, ABC; Today, NBC; and Morning, CBS. These shows regularly present guests whose expertise directly applies to relational life. During 1980-1982 these programs hosted an array of experts including sex therapists, marriage and family counselors, psychiatrists, psychologists, sociologists, dating agency personnel, to name but a few. Even a brief perusal of public bookstores reveals a plethora of popular books dealing with relationships. See, for example, George R. Bach and Peter Wyden, The Intimate Enemy (New York: Avon Books, 1968); Jessie Bernard, The Future of Marriage (New York: Bantam Books, 1972); Gail Sheehy, Passages: Predictable Crises of Adult Life (New York: Bantam Books, 1974); James Ramey, Intimate Friendships (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976); Nancy Friday, My Mother My Self (New York: Dell Pub., 1977); John M. Reisman, Anatomy of Friendship (Lexington, MA: The Lewis Pub. Co., 1979); Clifford J. Sager and Bernice Hunt, Intimate Partners: Hidden Patterns in Love Relationships (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Norton F. Kristy, Staying in Love: Reinventing Marriage and Other Love Relationships (New York: Jove Books, 1980); Sondra Ray, Loving Relationships: The Secrets of a Great Relationship (Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1980); Myron Brenton, Lasting Relationships: How to Recognize the Man or Woman Who's Right for You (New York: A and W Pub., 1981); and Susan Washburn, Partners: How to Have a Loving Relationship After Women's Liberation (New York: Atheneum, 1981).

[2] Mark L. Knapp, Donald G. Ellis and Barbara A. Williams, "Perceptions of Communication Behavior Associated with Relationship Terms," Communication Monographs, 47 (1980), 262-278.

[3] Robert Hopper, Mark L. Knapp and Lorel Scott, "Couples' Personal Idioms: Exploring Intimate Talk," Journal of Communication, 31 (1981), 23-33.

[4] Tamar Katriel and Gerry Philipsen, "'What We Need is Communication': 'Communication' as a Cultural Category in Some American Speech," Communication Monographs, 48 (1981), 301-317.

[5] Irwin Altman and Dalmus A. Taylor, Social Penetration: The Development of Interpersonal Relationships (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1973); and Mark L. Knapp, Social Intercourse: From Greeting to Goodbye (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1978).

[6] See Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, "A Typological Approach to Communication in Relationships," in Communication Yearbook 1, ed. Brent Ruben (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1977), pp. 263-275; and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick and Patricia Best, "Dyadic Adjustment in Relational Types: Consensus, Cohesion, Affectional Expression, and Satisfaction in Enduring Relationships," Communication Monographs, 46 (1979), 167-178.

[7] See, for example, Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin and Don Jackson, Pragmatics of Human Communication (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967); Robert A. Mark, "Coding Communication at the Relationship Level," Journal of Communication, 21 (1971), 221-232; L. Edna Rogers and Richard V. Farace, "Analysis of Relational Communication in Dyads: New Measurement Procedures," Human Communication Research, 1 (1975), 222-239; Donald G. Ellis, "Relational Control

in Two Group Systems," Communication Monographs, 46 (1979), 153-166; and Malcolm R. Parks, "Relational Communication: Theory and Research," Human Communication Research, 3 (1977), 372-381.

[8] William W. Wilmot,"Metacommunication: A Re-examination and Extension," in Communication Yearbook 4, ed. Dan Nimmo (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1980), p. 66.

[9] Wilmot, p. 66.

[10] Harry C. Triandis, Vasso Vassiliou and Maria Nassiakou, "Three Cross-Cultural Studies of Subjective Culture," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Monograph Supplement, 8 (1968), 1-42.

[11] Gerald Marwell and Jerald Hage, "The Organization of Role Relationships: A Systematic Description," American Sociological Review, 35 (1970), 884-900.

[12] Myron Wish, Morton Deutsch and Susan Kaplan, "Perceived Dimensions of Interpersonal Relations," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 33 (1976), 409-420.

[13] Arthur P. Bochner, Edmund P. Kaminski and Mary Anne Fitzpatrick, "The Conceptual Domain of Interpersonal Behavior: A Factor-Analytic Study," Human Communication Research, 3 (1977), 291-302.

[14] William C. Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld (Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books, 1966).

[15] Timothy Leary, Interpersonal Diagnosis of Personality: A Functional Theory and Methodology for Personality Evaluation (New York: The Ronald Press, 1957).

[16] For a representative view of naturalistic inquiry as followed here, see Norman K. Denzin, "The Logic of Naturalistic Inquiry," Social Forces, 50 (1971), 166-182; and Gerry Philipsen, "Linearity of Research Design in Ethnographic Studies of Speaking," Communication Quarterly, 25 (1977), 42-50.

[17] Edwin P. Willems, "Planning a Rationale for Naturalistic Research," in Naturalistic Viewpoints in Psychological Research ed. Edwin P. Willems and Harold L. Raush (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), pp. 44-71.

[18] See, for example, Myron Brenton, Friendship (New York: Stein and Day, 1974); Malcolm R. Parks, "Communication and Relational Change Processes: Conceptualization and Findings," Dissertation, Michigan State, 1976; Marilyn Rands and George Levinger, "Implicit Theories of Relationship: An Intergenerational Study," Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 37 (1979), 645-661; and Knapp, Ellis and Williams.

[19] See, for example, Mark S. Granovetter, "Network Sampling: Some First Steps," American Journal of Sociology, 81 (1976), 1287-1303. These procedures also are similar to the logic of "selective sampling" outlined by Schatzman and Strauss, see Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, Field Research: Strategies for a Natural Sociology (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), esp. pp. 38-43.

[20] The mean age was about thirty-four years, but varied from fifteen to eighty-eight years. There were seventy-five women and forty-three men. Most participants were White (112 White, three Asian, two Chicano, one Black), and relatively well educated

(ninety-four with college degrees, presently in college, or with some college experience, with twenty-two having high school diplomas, and two with junior high school backgrounds). Occupations ranged from students and teachers to chemists, bus drivers, nurses, and corporate executives. Seventy-seven persons reported they were single, while forty-eight were married, one divorced, and two widowed. While the mean duration of the relationships was about ten years, it varied from one hour to sixty-two years. Participants were drawn fom seven states and one province in Canada, although most lived in the United States Pacific Northwest. Finally, it is important to note that, since cotact persons were utilized, the researcher was present only during six of the fifty-five self reports.

[21] These topics were direct (e.g., "Talk about the strengths and weaknesses of your relationship") and indirect or metaphorical (e.g., "Imagine someone wrote a book about you two. What would be the title of the chapter titles? What would be the title of the book?").

[22] Don H. Zimmerman and D. Lawrence Wieder, "The Diary: Diary-Interview Method," Urban Life, 5 (1977), 479-498.

[23] Knapp, Ellis and Williams.

[24] Robert D. Hess and Gerald Handel, Family Worlds: A Psychosocial Approach to Family Life (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959), p. 11.

[25] Arthur P. Bochner, "Conceptual Frontiers in the Study of Communication in Families: An Introduction to the Literature," Human Communication Research, 2 (1976), 392.

[26] Jules Henry, Pathways to Madness (New York: Random House, 1965).

[27] Hess and Handel.

[28] Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality," Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58 (1972), 396-407.

[29] Bormann, 397.

[30] Throughout this report many verbatim quotations are used. The researcher aims to strike a balance between eventful data, and conceptual and theoretical examination of these units of discourse. This data-theory balance was informed by a reading of extant qualitative research and the few programmatic writings on the matter. See John Lofland, "Styles of Reporting Qualitative Field Research," The American Sociologist, 9 (1974), 101-111. Verbatim quotations indicate utterances or statements actually made by participants. Italics indicate emphasis as spoken or written. Ellipses note deleted material, repetition of letters show a prolonging of an utterance (e.g., Billll . . .), dashes note pauses, with several dashes indicating longer pauses. The researcher's clarifying comments and questions appear in brackets.

[31] Applying these criteria in ever increasing rigor in order to decide the dominant thematic meanings in relationships followed a similar procedure that is often used and recommended in group decision-making classes and textbooks. For example, see Scheidel and Crowell's explanation of "mixed scanning" as a procedure for reducing lists of decisions to a manageable, fewer number of alternatives. Thomas M. Scheidel and Laura Crowell, Discussing and Deciding (New York: Macmillan, 1979), chapter 10.

[32] Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 224.

[33] A study by Hill et al. found similar results. See Charles T. Hill, Zick Rubin and Letitia Anne Peplau, "Breakups Before Marriage: The End of 103 Affairs," Journal of Social Issues, 32 (1976), 147-168.

[34] Katriel and Philipsen's account of the concepts "communication," "self," and "relationship" as objects of interpersonal "work" corresponds to this theme. Katriel and Philpsen.

[35] Other participants used numerous business-like terms such as "negotiate," relationships as "conglomerations," "mergers," and so forth. What is perhaps more interesting,however, is the current use of "transaction" as the scholarly term for a model of interpersonal communication. See Stewart and D'Angelo's use of "transaction," especially in their concept of image transaction called "negotiation of selves." John Stewart and Gary D'Angelo, Together: Communicating Interpersonally, 2nd. ed. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 121-151.

[36] The three three-woman group discussions each included considerable talk about past failed romantic relations.

[37] See Fitzpatrick's study for a scheme for identifying relationship types comprised of "independents, separates and traditionals." Fitzpatrick, "A Typological Approach."

[38] See Elaine Walster and William Walster, A New Look at Love (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

[39] The manipulation of relational resources has been noted as the resource theory of interpersonal power, with affection as

one commodity. See, for example, Robert O. Blood, Jr. and Donald Wolfe, Husbands and Wives: The Dynamics of Married Living (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960); Constantina Safilios-Rothschild, "The Study of Family Power Structure: A Review, 1960-1969," Journal of Marriage and the Family, 32 (1970), 539-552.

[40] Charles R. Berger and Richard J. Calabrese, "Some Explorations in Initial Interaction and Beyond: Toward a Developmental Theory of Interpersonal Communication," Human Communication Research, 1 (1975), 99-112.

[41] Knapp, Social Intercourse, esp. pp. 20-21.

[42] Altman and Taylor, Social Penetration; Knapp, Social Intercourse.

[43] Knapp, Ellis and Williams.

[44] Knapp, Social Intercourse, esp. pp.21-23.

[45] The mean duration of relationship for the married couples was 16.3 years, while dating couples had been together for a mean of 3.8 years.

[46] Steven W. Duck, "Personal Relationships Research in the 1980's: Towards an Understanding of Complex Human Sociality," Western Journal of Speech Communication, 44 (1980), 118.

[47] Knapp, Social Intercourse, esp. pp. 183-229.

[48] Since there are several common dimensions found in these studies, I will limit my analysis to a relatively dated study, Schutz' three dimensional need theory, and a more recent study accomplished by Wish, Deutsch and Kaplan. Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld; Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions."

[49] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 24.

[50] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, pp. 25-28.

[51] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 414.

[52] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 24.

[53] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 59.

[54] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, pp. 30-31.

[55] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 419.

[56] C. E. Osgood, G. J. Suci and P. H. Tannenbaum, The Measurement of Meaning (Urbana, Illinois: The Univ. of Illinois Press, 1957).

[57] Knapp, Ellis and Williams.

[58] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 414.

[59] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 24.

[60] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 31.

[61] Hopper, Knapp and Scott, "Couples' Personal Idioms."

[62] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 413-414.

[63] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 412.

[64] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 23.

[65] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 412.

[66] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 417.

[67] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 25.

[68] Schutz, The Interpersonal Underworld, p. 29.

[69] Wish et al., "Perceived Dimensions," 413.